



Making Life Easier
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Helping Your Parents Plan for the Future

REVIEWED DEC 26, 2006

Starting a conversation with your parents about their future and possible inability to care for themselves can be difficult. Most people don't like to think about planning ahead for the possibility of a traumatic event or sudden illness. But pre-planning is critical when an unfortunate event occurs. No matter how difficult the subject, the time to talk and plan is when your parents are healthy, alert and able to make clear decisions.

Having these discussions now can save you years of uncertainty and financial strain in the future. Most parents are relieved to be able to express their wishes openly—especially when they understand that you are helping them to carry out their wishes and that failure to make plans can directly and adversely affect their future well-being.

Planning can be elaborate or simple. This is a time when parents can consider what is really important to them in terms of health, housing, activities and fulfillment. It usually begins by helping your parents express their wishes both verbally and in written form. Some of the important points of discussion might include:

Where would you like to live if your health should fail?

Today there are a wide variety of living situations to accommodate older adults as their need for assistance grows. Options that help your parents maintain their independence might include home health care, home-share, retirement communities, and assisted living. Information on what is available in your parent's community can be obtained from the Area Agency on Aging.

What sort of financial resources are available?

Look at available assets and insurance coverage. Long-term health care coverage might be an option. Some parents feel hesitant about discussing finances with their children. If this is the case, a local agency, financial planner or elder law attorney might be helpful.

Who will manage your affairs if you should become unable?

Options include appointing a power of attorney or durable power of attorney, establishing a trust, a conservatorship or guardianship. To examine specific legal tools, the services of an elder law

attorney can be a good resource.

What are your health care wishes?

This might be an area where you demonstrate your belief in planning for the future by completing your own advance directive. “I am filling out my living will and medical power of attorney. Would you like to discuss your wishes?” Health care advance directives enable you to specify the treatments you want to receive or not want to receive if you can not speak for yourself. The health care power of attorney empowers someone to make your medical decisions when you are no longer able. To obtain advance directives forms for each state, contact the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization, (800) 989-WILL (9455) or www.nhpco.org.

What arrangements have you made or do you want made in the event of your death ?

A will is the tool most often used to direct how property and money are to be distributed upon death. Not to be confused with a living will, a will relates to the estate and how it will be divided.

These are just some of the options available to help older adults maintain control of their future. For most of us, the process of beginning this discussion with our parents is challenging, but if we remember that we are talking “with” and not “to” our parents, this process might spark a new bond of understanding in the relationship.

Resource

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